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Letter dated 14 December 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a message from the World Summit of Religious Leaders (Moscow, 3-5 July 2006) (see annex) and to request the circulation of this letter and its annex as a document of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly under agenda item 44. .

(*Signed*) V. **Churkin**

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Annex to the letter dated 14 December 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

MESSAGE FROM THE WORLD SUMMIT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS (Moscow, 3-5 July 2006)

We, participants in the World Summit of Religious Leaders – heads and delegates of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Shinto religious communities in 49 countries, met in Moscow on the eve of the Group of Eight Summit. Having at length discussed issues of mutual concern, we now appeal to the heads of States, to our religious communities and to all people of good will.

We believe that the human person is religious by nature. Since the dawn of history, religion has played the key role in the development of thought, culture, ethics and the social order. With the ever growing role of faith in contemporary society, we want religion to continue being a solid foundation for peace and dialogue amongst civilizations, and not to be used as a source of division and conflict. Religion has the potential to bind together diverse peoples and cultures despite our human fragility, particularly in today's context of plurality and diversity.

Human life is a gift of the Almighty. Our sacred duty is to preserve it, and this should be the concern of both religious communities and political leaders.

Dialogue and partnership among civilizations should not just be slogans. We need to build a world order which combines democracy - as the way of harmonizing different interests and as people's participation in national and global decision-making - and respect to the moral feeling, way of life, various legal and political systems, and national and religious traditions of people. Comprehensive, just and durable solutions of international disputes should be reached by peaceful means. We reject double standards in international relations. The world should have many poles and many systems, meeting the requirements of all individuals and nations rather than matching lifeless and oversimplified ideological patterns.

The human being is the Creator's unique creation whose existence reaches into eternity. Humans should not become either a commodity or an object of political manipulation or an element of the production and consumption machine.

It is, therefore, necessary to assert constantly the highest value of human life from conception to the final breath and natural death. Thus the family needs support today, for it is the privileged context for cultivating the free, intelligent and moral personality. We call for more assistance to the family, particularly in its formative mission, by national and international law and the practice of States, various public institutions, religious communities and the mass media. Linked to this is our concern for the status of women and children in many societies. Promoting the unique character of every person, women and men, children and the elderly, as well as people with disabilities, we see that they all have their special gifts. Protecting them from violence and exploitation is a common task for the authorities, the society, and religious communities.

The human being is the supreme creation of the Almighty. Therefore human rights, their protection and respect at the national, regional and international levels is an important concern for us. Nevertheless, our experience also shows that without an ethical core, without understanding our duties, no society or country is exempt from conflict and collapse. Sin and vice ruin both the individual and the society. For this reason we are convinced that law and social order should seek to bring together in fruitful harmony a commitment to rights and freedom as well as an awareness of the ethical principles that are constitutive of human living together.

We state the importance of religious freedom in today's world. Individuals and groups must be immune from coercion. No one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own beliefs in religious matters. It is also necessary to take into account the rights of religious and ethnic minorities.

We condemn terrorism and extremism of any form, as well as attempts to justify them by religion. We consider it our duty to oppose enmity on political, ethnic or religious grounds. We deplore the activities of pseudo-religious groups and movements destroying freedom and health of people as well as the ethical climate in societies. Using religion as a means for rousing hatred or an excuse for crimes against individuals, morality and humanity present a major challenge today. This can be effectively addressed only through education and moral formation. School, mass media, and preaching by religious leaders should return to our contemporaries the full knowledge of their religious traditions which call them to peace and love.

We call for an end to any insult to religious feelings and defilement of texts, symbols, names or places held sacred by believers. Those who abuse sacred things should know that it wounds the hearts and stirs up strife among the people.

Through education and social action, we must reassert sustainable ethical values in the consciousness of people. We believe these values to be given to us by the Almighty and deeply rooted in human nature. They are shared by our religions in many practical ways. We feel responsible for the moral condition of our societies and want to shoulder this responsibility in working together with States and civil associations enabling a life where ethical values are an asset and a source of sustainability.

Human life is also interrelated with economy. International economic order, as all other spheres of global architecture, should be based on justice. All economic and business activities should be socially responsible and carried out using ethical standards. It is this that makes the economy really efficient, that is, beneficial to the people. A life lived only for financial profit and facilitating production progress becomes barren and meagre. Being aware of this, we call on the business community to be open and responsible towards civil society, including religious communities, at the national and global levels.

It is imperative that all governments and the business community alike be responsible stewards of the resources of our planet. These resources, as given to all generations by the Creator, should be used for the benefit of everyone. All nations have the right to use their resources, sharing them with others, as well as to develop technologies for their effective use and preservation. The responsible distribution of the Earth's richness, in addition to just international trade and active humanitarian involvement, will help overcome the poverty and hunger suffered by billions of our brothers and sisters. Poverty and social vulnerability become the cause of mass migration generating more and more problems in both poor and rich countries. The concentration of the majority of the world's wealth in the hands of a few, while an enormous number of people, especially children, live in abject poverty, is a global tragedy. It will most definitely continue to destabilize the world, threatening global peace. We call upon all nations to return to a life of moderation, self-restraint and active justice. This will secure a hopeful future for upcoming generations and effectively function to cut the ground out from under the feet of extremists and terrorists.

The governments, religious communities and peoples of the world should work together to face the challenges of today, such as infectious disease epidemics, particularly AIDS, as well as drug addiction, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. No country, regardless of wealth and power, can cope with these threats on its own. We are all interconnected and share a common destiny. This requires concerted and united action by all member States of the international community. Moreover, the spread of diseases is not a concern for doctors alone, and the dissemination of lethal technologies is not a problem for law-enforcers alone. These challenges should become a common concern for the whole society.

Interreligious dialogue should be maintained by the religious leaders and experts, and be enriched by the contribution of ordinary believers. It is inappropriate, and history shows that it is dangerous, for the actions of religious communities to be dictated by political interests. We also deplore attempts to artificially 'merge' the

religious traditions or to change them without the will of their adherents in order to bring them closer to secularism.

Our communities are also ready to develop dialogue with the adherents of non-religious views, with politicians, with all civil society structures, with international organizations. It is our hope that such a dialogue will continue, permitting religions to contribute to concord and understanding among nations, a common home founded on the truth, built according to justice, vivified by love and liberty. This dialogue should be conducted on an equal footing, in a responsible way and on a regular basis, with openness to any themes, without ideological prejudice. We believe that the time has come for a more systemic partnership of religious leaders with the United Nations.

Making a special appeal to all the believers, we urge them to respect and accept one another regardless of their religious, national or other differences. Let us help one another and all people of good will in building a better future for the entire human family. Let us preserve the peace given to us by the Almighty!